

Forgiving the terrorists of the Years of Lead in Italy: The role of restorative justice beliefs and sociocognitive determinants

Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

1-15

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1368430215570503

gpir.sagepub.com



Camillo Regalia,¹ Sara Pelucchi,¹ Francesca Giorgia Paleari,²
Claudia Manzi,¹ and Maria Brambilla¹

Abstract

The period of political terrorism named the “Years of Lead” (*Anni di Piombo*) started in Italy at the end of the 1960s and lasted until the late 1980s. The social wounds of this bloody time are still not healed, and there is a social debate about the opportunity to concede forgiveness to those responsible for those crimes. Drawing from the intergroup forgiveness literature, we tested a model explaining under which conditions forgiveness towards terrorists could be supported by Italian citizens. The model was tested in two generations: 331 Italian citizens who were adolescents or adults during the terrorism period and 208 Italian young adults born after the end of the Years of Lead. Findings showed that restorative justice beliefs and sociocognitive variables, like outgroup empathy and trust, were uniquely linked to forgiveness towards the terrorists.

Keywords

empathy, outgroup forgiveness, restorative justice beliefs, terrorism, trust

Paper received 17 February 2014; revised version accepted 12 December 2014.

A major issue in intergroup postconflict situations is the removal of socioemotional barriers that leave the opposing parties estranged and are likely to interfere with their reconciliation (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006; Nadler & Shnabel, 2006). According to Shnabel and Nadler (2008), one major way perpetrators and victims can remove socioemotional barriers and satisfy these two basic needs is through granting forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness restores perpetrators’ public image and their sense of belonging to the moral community. Not surprisingly,

outgroup trust has been consistently found to be a crucial predictor of intergroup forgiveness (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Noor,

¹Catholic University of Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy

²Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy

Corresponding author:

Camillo Regalia, Department of Psychology, Catholic University of Sacred Heart, Largo Gemelli, 20121 Milan, Italy.

Email: camillo.regalia@unicatt.it

Brown, & Prentice, 2008), as has outgroup empathy, a variable closely related to outgroup trust (Cehajic et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2006; Noor et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2008). Because the magnitude of the effects of outgroup empathy and trust on forgiveness varies according to the type of intergroup conflict considered (e.g., interstate or intrastate; van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2014), it is particularly important to examine the relations between these variables in disparate contexts of conflict.

Intergroup conflict that originated from political terrorism of the Years of Lead (*Anni di Piombo*), which affected the Italian political and social life from the 1960s to the 1980s, has not been analysed in relation to forgiveness and its predictors. Because this conflict has peculiar features that, as we will briefly delineate, distinguish it from those that have been investigated in intergroup forgiveness research, we decided to explore whether variables that the literature has argued to be crucial in promoting intergroup forgiveness may also be effective in this conflictual context. In particular, we investigated whether Italian citizens' forgiveness towards the Years of Lead terrorists is predicted not only by empathy and trust towards the terrorists, but also by beliefs in restorative justice; the latter's association with intergroup forgiveness has not been previously explored.

The Years of Lead Wounds and Their Forgiveness

The so-called "Years of Lead," the period of Italian terrorism lasting about twenty years from 1969 (the bomb blast in Piazza Fontana Bank, Milano) to 1988 (the murder of Senator Ruffilli), represents the gravest political, social, and civil crisis for Italy since the end of the Second World War. Two interconnected types of violence were perpetrated systematically during those years: one against specific individuals who held central positions at the institutional, political, and media level (terrorist attacks *ad personam*) and one against masses of people who had the misfortune to be

in the wrong place at the wrong time (terrorist massacres). Extreme left-wing organizations (e.g., Red Brigades or Front Line) and neo-fascist groups (e.g., New Order) began terrorizing Italy in an escalation of violence that caused the death of hundreds of people and the murder of figures and symbols of the State, with the aim of aggravating the existing social conflict so much as destroying the existing order. During this period, people lived in fear and uncertainty: they felt helpless and lacking control due to nearly daily violence. It was not a civil war, but a climate of terror imposed by a minority outgroup, which, however, actually launched an armed offensive against the State for many years. In contrast to outgroups typically investigated by the forgiveness literature, Years of Lead terrorists did not differ from Italian citizen ingroup members by nationality, ethnicity, or religion, but by the choice to fight the existing order through an organized armed struggle. Even if terrorists' organizations are dissolved, and their surviving members are not represented by a recognized political party, the former terrorists nevertheless remain an identifiable group within Italian society.

Members of Italian political institutions have endeavoured to understand what really happened during the Years of Lead since 1988, when a Parliamentary Commission on Terrorism was established (Fasabella & Pellegrino, 2005). Nonetheless, these efforts have so far produced quite modest results. Even though the violence and the terrorist attacks of the Years of Lead are long past, many dark aspects of that period remain unclarified and unresolved. For example, a significant number of terrorists have not been identified, prosecuted, or convicted; responsibilities shared by politicians and state secret services have not been addressed. Thus, in recent years, public opinion as well as political institutions and the national media have increasingly argued for the need to shed light on the Years of Lead events and their causes, so as to arrive at a shared narrative of that period. At the same time, public attention has turned to the victims in the last decade: the surviving victims and the relatives of those murdered or hurt were finally allowed to

publicly narrate and see acknowledged what they have been suffering. Some of them have shown a benevolent attitude and have explicitly expressed their forgiveness towards the perpetrators; the majority, supported by the national associations of victims of terrorism, has, however, pronounced against any public forgiveness. The controversy, often harsh and fuelled by the frequent lack of apology and repentance by the perpetrators, remained largely confined to the victim–terrorist interactions.

Assuming a different perspective, the present work examines forgiveness not from the viewpoint of either direct victims or their relatives, but from that of Italian citizens who, living during the Years of Lead or, for the younger generations, inheriting the narratives of the period, have themselves suffered its significant consequences. As Pemberton noted, “terrorism affects society at large as if they were victims themselves” (2014, p. 374). Terrorist attacks are not only carried out to threaten, frighten, and influence a far larger group of people than direct physical targets, but they are also felt by these people as their own victimization. Terrorism implies a “collective victimization, even though most, if not all of those experiencing a sense of victimhood, did not personally experience the victimization themselves” (Pemberton, 2014, p. 376).

Accordingly, a recent study on Italian citizens’ social representation of the Years of Lead attested that this period still represents a social trauma across different generations (Pelucchi & Brambilla, 2013). Whether they lived during the Years of Lead or, being born later, learned about it indirectly, Italians consider this period of their history a painful, open social wound; they also share strongly negative feelings towards the terrorists whom they perceive as an intrinsically wicked minority outgroup.

In light of the previous considerations, it is therefore plausible to assume that those who have to cope with the open wounds of those years are not only the direct victims or their relatives, but also the collective as a whole.

Forgiveness research suggests that a possibly effective way to heal wounds suffered by a group

at the hands of another and move towards an enduring reconciliation between the two is through intergroup forgiveness (Azar, Mullet, & Vinsonneau, 1999; Nadler & Saguy, 2004). Intergroup forgiveness is often conceptualized as a set of prosocial, intrapsychic changes in which a reduction in negative emotions and cognitions towards a perceived offending outgroup results in a decreasing motivation to retaliate and be resentful towards that outgroup, in a decreasing motivation to maintain estrangement from it, as well as in an increasing motivation to offer mercy and be benevolent towards that outgroup (Hewstone et al., 2013; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). The transformations entailed in the forgiveness process have been proven to promote not only intergroup reconciliation, but also mental health of people living in postconflict societies (Myers, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2009).

Besides being morally controversial, any attempt to directly pressure a victimized community to forgive is, however, likely to be ineffective and even backfire (Tam et al., 2008). For this reason, it is important to understand which psychological processes can be fostered to indirectly improve outgroup forgiveness. The aim of the present study was therefore to explore whether two variables that the literature indicates are decisive in facilitating intergroup forgiveness, that is outgroup empathy and trust, uniquely predict forgiveness towards terrorists, even in the specific case of the Italian citizens who were victimized by Years of Lead terrorists for decades.

Empathy and Trust as Antecedents of Intergroup Forgiveness

Among the sociocognitive factors that are likely to promote intergroup forgiveness, special attention has been given to outgroup empathy and trust. Outgroup trust can be defined as an intergroup emotion (Brewer & Alexander, 2002) that promotes benign assumptions about outgroup members. Nadler and Liviatan (2006) indicated that outgroup distrust is the most common emotional consequence of protracted violent conflicts. Trust

reduces suspicion and promotes a benevolent disposition towards the offending outgroup members (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). Although trust is likely to be not only an antecedent but also a consequence of forgiveness (see McLernon, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2002), existing evidence shows that there should be some degree of trust in the outgroup for forgiveness to occur (Hewstone et al., 2006; Noor et al., 2008). Also, outgroup trust has been found to significantly mediate the positive relationship between intergroup contact and intergroup forgiveness (Cehajic et al., 2008).

Given that outgroup empathy plays an important role in building outgroup trust (Hewstone et al., 2014), it is not surprising that it is closely related to intergroup forgiveness as well. Outgroup empathy, defined as the capacity to share and understand outgroup feelings (empathic affect) and/or to cognitively assume the outgroup perspective (perspective-taking), reduces the tendency to blame outgroup members for the ingroup's suffering (Finlay & Stephan, 2000) and enhances forgiveness and positive attitudes towards them (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Hewstone et al., 2006; Noor et al., 2008). Like trust, empathy is a proximal predictor of intergroup forgiveness and mediates the links that more distal antecedents have with it. In particular, the positive influence that intergroup contact and the negative influence that inhumanization and ingroup identification have upon intergroup forgiveness have been proven to be significantly mediated by outgroup empathy across different conflictual contexts (Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and the tensions originated by friendly fire incidents perpetrated by Afghans against Canadians; Cehajic et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2004; Hewstone et al., 2014; Tam et al., 2008; Wohl, Hornsey, & Bennett, 2012).

Since outgroup trust and outgroup empathy are related (Cehajic et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2014), the present study aimed to verify whether each of these two predictors is related to forgiveness towards Years of Lead terrorists independently of the other.

Restorative Justice Beliefs and Intergroup Forgiveness

The resolution of postconflict situations involves the recognition and fulfilment of the victims' legitimate desire for justice. Thus, even the Italian public debate concerning the most practicable ways to cope with the sequelae of the Years of Lead is closely related to the discussion on how to pursue justice. Victims of terrorism—whether they are direct, indirect (relatives of direct victims), or any Italian citizen—seek justice for their suffering. In this respect, a key issue concerns the meaning given to the term *justice*. The notion of justice people adopt is likely to affect the strategies they choose to resolve conflicts (Leidner, Castano, & Ginges, 2013).

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct views of what justice is and of what its goals are: a retributive view and a restorative one (Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008). According to the retributive perspective, justice is a unilateral assertion against offenders aimed at punishing them and minimizing their future offending behaviours. In the alternative restorative perspective, justice is achieved "through a renewed understanding between victim and offender, thus addressing concerns over the violation of shared norms and values that define the victim-offender relationship or common group identity" (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014, p. 465). In this second perspective, restorative justice beliefs are clearly oriented towards promoting reconciliation practices, the aim of which is to transform the conflict situation so as to provide the starting point of a relational reconstruction. Specifically, transgressions and wrongdoings are considered *social conflicts* (de Keijser, van der Leeden, & Jackson, 2002) that can be healed through an open dialogue and joint decisions between all parties.

Are retributive and restorative justice related to forgiveness? There is empirical evidence that victims are more willing to forgive when measures have been taken to restore their sense of justice, but only in a restorative stance. In a series of studies, it has been shown that justice is positively related to interpersonal forgiveness when justice

is conceived in restorative rather than retributive terms (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014). A possible explanation for this positive effect of restorative justice on interpersonal forgiveness relates to the positive emotions and cognitions that the restorative justice process elicits towards the offender, such as hope and trust.

However, no empirical research, to our knowledge, has investigated the relationship between intergroup forgiveness and restorative justice beliefs. Nevertheless, many authors agree that the restorative justice approach may have a relevant role in conflict situations. According to Morrison and Ahmed (2006), moving towards the perspective of restorative justice means considering that "the civil society invests in and values social capital, using the strength of social ties to work constructively, and beneficially, through social conflict" (pp. 209–210). It is plausible to assume that people who think that justice should aim at repairing relationships between victims, offenders, and community are more prone to forgive the perpetrators of the crimes. A further aim of the present study was therefore to analyse whether Italian citizens' restorative justice beliefs are positively related to forgiveness towards Years of Lead terrorists.

The Present Study

The main purpose of the present study was to identify possible predictors of Italian citizens' forgiveness towards terrorists who were active in Italy during the Years of Lead. As proposed by Wohl and Branscombe (2008), the collective negative emotions against an outgroup who committed past crimes towards the ingroup are also experienced by those ingroup members who were not directly influenced by these crimes. This probably happens because if they identified with the victimized ingroup and are vicariously exposed to outgroup violence against the ingroup via the media, individuals providing second-hand knowledge of events, or personal experience reported in their family and social lives, they feel victimized as well (McAloney, McCrystal, Percy, & McCartan, 2009). Consistently, existing evidence on the issue

(Pelucchi & Brambilla, 2013) attests that the Years of Lead were perceived as an open and painful social wound not only by Italian citizens who lived during this period, but also by the new generations who learned about it indirectly through the narratives of that troubled period. This suggests that, across different generations, Italian citizens have collectively dealt with the aftermath of the Years of Lead wounds.

Drawing on the intergroup forgiveness literature previously reviewed, we therefore examined whether outgroup empathy, outgroup trust, and restorative justice beliefs were significantly related to Italian citizens' forgiveness towards the Years of Lead terrorists. Since our definition of intergroup forgiveness refers both to a decreasing motivation to be resentful towards the outgroup, as well as to an increasing motivation to offer mercy and be benevolent towards the outgroup (Hewstone et al., 2013; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013), in this study we developed and used a bidimensional measure of intergroup forgiveness, which assessed separately both benevolence and resentment toward the terrorists.

We assumed that the more Italian citizens trusted the Years of Lead terrorists, assumed their perspective, and believed that justice should have restorative goals, the more they were likely to be benevolent and not resentful towards the terrorists for the crimes they inflicted on Italians for decades (see Figure 1).

A further goal of the present study was to verify whether the hypothesized links between the investigated variables differed as a function of the generations of Italians that we considered. In particular, we examined whether outgroup empathy, outgroup trust, and restorative justice beliefs differently predicted forgiveness towards terrorists across two generations: the generation of Italians who, being adult or young during the Years of Lead, were directly exposed to the climate of terror of that period, and the generations born after the Years of Lead, suffering its consequences only indirectly. As far as we know, this was amongst the first studies to explore whether outgroup forgiveness was differently related to its predictors across different

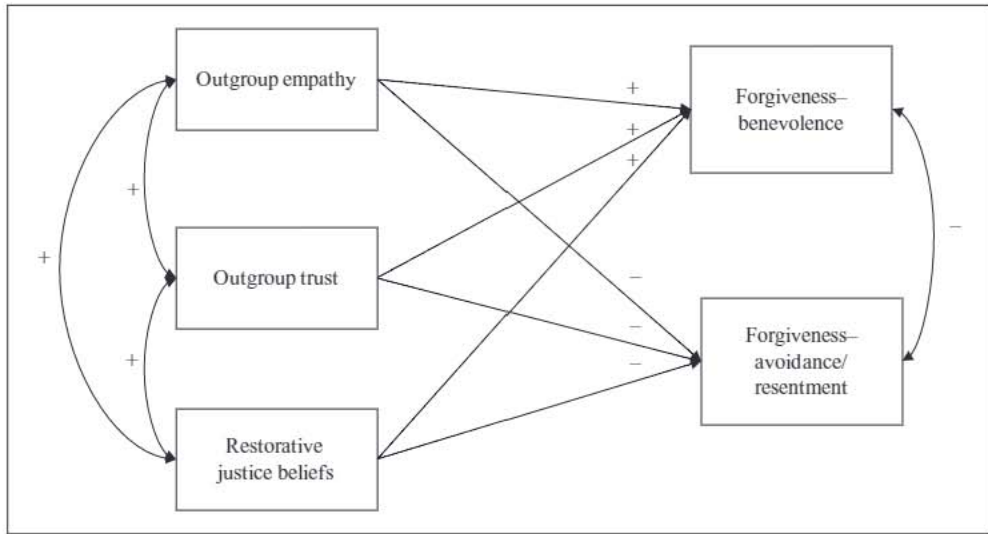


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of concurrent relations among outgroup empathy, outgroup trust, restorative justice beliefs, forgiveness-benevolence, and forgiveness-resentment.

generational cohorts; for this reason, we did not posit specific assumptions on this point.

Finally, we also tested the model while controlling for political orientation. As we underlined previously, the Years of Lead was a period of political violence caused by a minority outgroup including both extreme left and right violent activists. Nowadays there are no Italian parties on the right or left whose ideology is even remotely similar to the ideology of the terrorist groups of the Years of Lead, and therefore we did not expect respondents' political ideology to affect the pattern of results.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence in the literature showing that political orientation is likely to affect intergroup forgiveness (Noor et al., 2008, Study 1) or to be related to values which are likely to enhance restorative justice and forgiveness (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; Gromet & Darley, 2011). As a consequence we decided to measure and statistically control for political orientation in order to test whether the hypothesized model worked independently of the influence of this variable.

Before testing our main predictions, we first verified that, across the two different generations

investigated, respondents felt that the wounds inflicted by terrorists on Italian society were still open and currently have an impact on Italian social and political life.

Method

Respondents and Procedure

Respondents were 640 Italian citizens who were recruited for this study through political, social, and educational institutions, such as left and right political party associations, retirement homes for the elderly, and universities from different regions of Italy. The response rate was very high (95%). After giving their consent to the research, respondents were administered a questionnaire as part of a larger study on the social representations of political violence in the Italian population. One filter question asked the respondents if they were acquainted with or relatives of terrorists or terrorists' victims. Sixty-nine respondents declared that they knew at least one person who belonged to one or both of the aforementioned categories (terrorists and victims) and were excluded from the analyses.

The final sample comprised 539 Italian citizens (52.1% women), whose age ranged from 20 to 83 ($M = 49$, $SD = 18.1$), representing two generational cohorts: those who were not born during the Years of Lead ($N = 208$) and those who were born during the Years of Lead ($N = 331$). The level of education was comparable to the general Italian situation: 41.3% of respondents had a technical school diploma or a high school diploma, 20.8% of them had a lower level of study than diploma, and 37.8% of respondents had a higher level degree.

Measures

Outgroup empathy. Empathy towards the terrorists was assessed using a four-item scale: two items assessing perspective-taking were originally created by Noor et al. (2008) and adapted to the Italian situation, and two items assessing affective empathy were adapted from items originally used by Swart, Hewstone, Christ, and Voci (2011; sample items are "Before judging the members of the terrorists of the Years of Lead for their past misdeeds, I always try to put myself in their shoes"; "I feel compassion for the terrorists of Years of Lead"). For each item, respondents used a 6-point Likert-type format (1 = *completely disagree*; 6 = *completely agree*). The reliability coefficient was .77.

Outgroup trust. Respondents rated their trust towards the terrorists on a four-item scale originally created by Noor et al. (2008) and adapted to the Italian situation. "I believe that the majority of the terrorists of the Years of Lead are fair" and "I believe that I can trust few people among the terrorists of the Years of Lead" (reverse coded) are sample items. For each item, respondents used a 6-point Likert-type format (1 = *completely disagree*; 6 = *completely agree*). The reliability coefficient was .86.

Restorative justice beliefs. Respondents' beliefs concerning the principles of restorative justice were measured using the five-item Restorative Justice Goals Scale created by Strelan, Feather, and McKee (2011). "Justice should be about trying to

heal relations between a victim, the offender, and the community" and "Justice should be more about resolving conflicts, and less about punishing offenders" are sample items. For each item, respondents used a 6-point Likert-type format (1 = *completely disagree*; 6 = *completely agree*). The reliability coefficient was .84.

Forgiveness towards the terrorists. A new measure of intergroup forgiveness towards the terrorists was created for this study drawing from existing measures of intergroup forgiveness (Cehajic et al., 2008; Noor et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2007). It comprises five items aimed at assessing the presence of benevolent motivations (e.g., "I think it is now possible to forgive the terrorists of the Years of Lead for the violence committed during those years") and four items measuring the presence of avoidant and resentful motivations towards the Years of Lead terrorists (e.g., "I wish that the terrorists of the Years of Lead suffered as much as they caused suffering to others"). For each item, respondents used a 6-point Likert-type format (1 = *completely disagree*; 6 = *completely agree*). In order to investigate the dimensionality of the forgiveness items, we randomly split our sample into two equally numerous subsamples.

First, we conducted exploratory factor analysis on one subsample and, consistent with Russell's (2002) recommendations, extracted factors using a principal axis factoring and an oblimin rotation (McDonald, 1985). The exploratory factor analysis revealed two correlated factors that explained 48% of the total item variance. The four avoidance-resentment items loaded strongly and positively on the first factor, explaining 25.8% of total item variance. The five benevolence items loaded strongly and positively on the second factor, explaining 22.2% of the total item variance. The two factors were negatively correlated, $r = -.42$; all of the items showed loadings greater than .30 on one factor and very low cross-loadings on the other factor.

Secondly, using the remaining subsample, we assessed the validity of the two-factor solution for the nine forgiveness items by means of confirmatory factor analysis. Mardia's (1970) coefficients

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables ($N = 539$).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Outgroup empathy	—				
2. Outgroup trust	.44**	—			
3. Restorative justice beliefs	.36**	.23**	—		
4. Forgiveness—benevolence	.41**	.42**	.27**	—	
5. Forgiveness—resentment	-.20**	-.37**	-.28**	-.35**	—
<i>M</i>	2.13	2.11	3.31	2.26	3.07
<i>SD</i>	0.02	0.84	1.08	0.85	1.35

** $p < .01$.

suggested significant deviations from multivariate normality for the forgiveness items. To reduce the impact of nonnormality, we relied on the scaled estimates of Satorra and Bentler (2001) in rescaling the chi-square statistics into the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square (S-B χ^2) statistic. Fit indices like the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Bentler, 1995) were also adjusted for nonnormality by incorporating the S-B χ^2 into their calculations. We refer to them as robust estimates (i.e., R-CFI, R-RMSEA). The two-factor oblique model, in which the four avoidance-resentment items were allowed to load on one factor and the five benevolence items on another related factor, provided an adequate fit to the data, when error variance across two items loading on the same benevolence dimension—"I do not feel any negative feelings towards the terrorists of the Years of Lead" and "I feel I have forgiven the terrorists for the offences they caused to society"—were allowed to correlate, S-B $\chi^2(25) = 45.68$, $p = .007$, R-CFI = .947, R-RMSEA = .075. The two factors were negatively correlated, $r = -.39$, and all factor loadings were greater than .30. The reliability coefficient was good for both the avoidance-resentment and the benevolence dimensions ($\alpha = .80$ and .76, respectively, when computed on the whole sample).

Perception of terrorism as open wound for Italian society. A single item (ranging from 1 = *very low* to 6 = *very high*) assessed how much the respondents rated the Years of Lead as a period that still

represents an open wound for Italian society as a whole.

Political orientation was assessed on a 10-point continuum from 1 (*left*) to 10 (*right*). This item, which is routinely administered in the European Social Survey (ESS) and in other multinational surveys such as the European Values Survey, was the cornerstone of a number of political psychological studies, and is widely considered a valid and reliable measure of left/right identification (Corbetta, Cavazza, & Roccato, 2009); 69.7 % of the respondents placed themselves on the Left (between 1 and 5 on the continuum).

Results

Before testing the posited model, we analysed whether respondents actually perceived the terrorism as a still open wound for Italian society. Respondents' mean score on the item was slightly higher than the theoretical average ($M = 3.65$), suggesting that the wound is perceived as still open. There was a generational difference: the older generation perceived the wound more than the younger one ($M = 3.84$ and $M = 3.49$ $t = -2.93$; $p < .01$).

Single indicators of the variables under study were then calculated through the item's mean. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables investigated are reported in Table 1.

As we can see from the mean values, respondents reported low levels of empathy and trust towards terrorists, moderately believed that justice

should address restorative goals, and expressed low levels of benevolence and moderate levels of avoidance and resentment towards terrorists. The overall picture is consistent with the generally negative outlook towards the terrorists by Italian society.

In order to test our theoretical model, we carried out preliminary analyses to check the variable distributions for univariate and multivariate normality. No problems were found concerning skew or kurtosis. We also found normalized estimates of Mardia's coefficient to be acceptable (< 3). We then estimated via structural equation modeling (EQS; Bentler, 1992) a series of path analysis models with benevolence and avoidance-resentment as the outcome variables (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995).

First, we tested our theoretical model in which empathy, trust, and restorative justice beliefs were directly related to the two forgiveness dimensions. In order to gain at least one degree of freedom after considering the covariation between the variables, the path between empathy and resentment was not calculated. This model showed adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(1) = .732, p = .11$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, and explained 17.3% of the variance in resentment and 25.6% in benevolence, respectively.

As a second step, we estimated competing models to evaluate models with different proposed directions of causality; this procedure was aimed at demonstrating that these alternative models provided a worse fit to the data than the presented model did. We estimated two competing models in the current set of analyses: (a) a first model in which the direction of effects between the two dimensions of forgiveness and the predictor variables was reversed; (b) a second model in which empathy and trust directly predicted resentment and benevolence, which in turn predicted restorative justice. The hypothesized model was compared to the alternatives using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1973; Burnham & Anderson, 2002). When comparing nonnested models estimated from the same data set, the model with the smaller AIC value is considered best. The model previously proposed

obtained a smaller AIC (theoretical model AIC = -1.88) and thus a better fit to the data than the two competing models (first alternative model AIC = $.21$; second alternative model AIC = 36.38). Based on these results, the alternative models could be rejected, and the model shown in Figure 1 turned out to be the most parsimonious explanation of the data. Figure 2 shows the significant paths in the model. As shown in Figure 2 benevolence was significantly predicted by empathy ($\beta = .25$), trust ($\beta = .29$), and restorative justice beliefs ($\beta = .12$); avoidance-resentment was significantly predicted by trust ($\beta = -.32$) and restorative justice beliefs ($\beta = -.20$); the two dimensions of forgiveness were significantly correlated ($r = -.21$) as were empathy and trust ($r = .44$), empathy and restorative justice ($r = .36$), and trust and restorative justice beliefs ($r = .23$). Even if empathy, trust, and restorative justice beliefs were significantly related, each of these predictors was a significant predictor of forgiveness independently of the other.

To test if the model could vary as a function of generational cohort, we performed a multi-sample path analysis. The sample was split into two subgroups: those who were not born during the Years of Lead ($N = 208$) and those who were ($N = 331$). We started by computing a fully constrained model, considering all structural paths and covariation between variables to be equal for the two samples. This model showed adequate fit indices, $\chi^2(11) = 6.57, p = .83$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, attesting that the structural paths in the model did not vary as a function of generational cohort.

Finally, we considered political orientation as a control variable in the model. The sample was moderately left-wing biased, and therefore we checked whether the pattern of relations amongst variables investigated was consistent, independently of political orientation. This model showed good fit to the data: $\chi^2(1) = 2.041, p = .15$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .04. None of the paths in the model in Figure 2 changed its significance, attesting that empathy, trust, and restorative justice beliefs significantly predict forgiveness towards the terrorists, independently of the

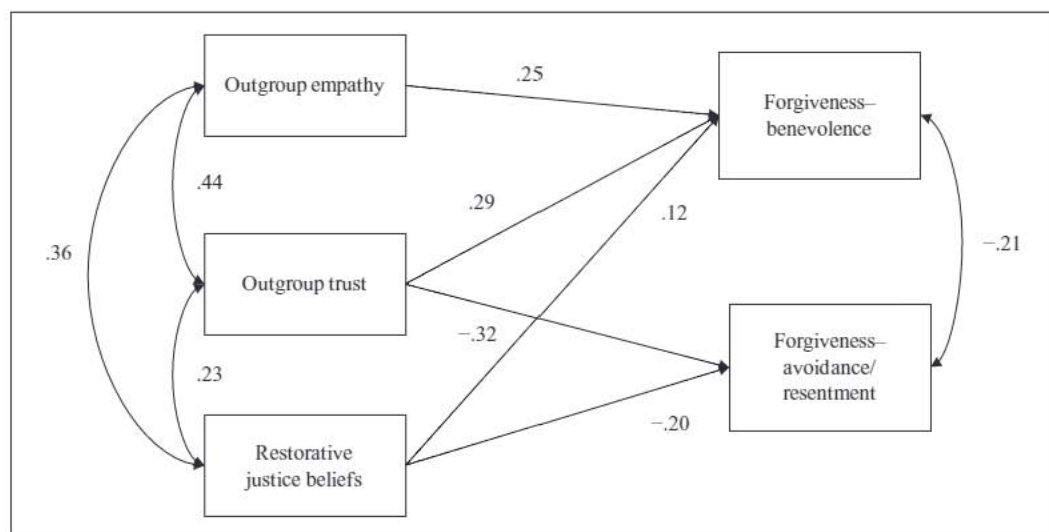


Figure 2. Paths of obtained relations among outgroup empathy, outgroup trust, restorative justice beliefs, forgiveness-benevolence, and forgiveness-resentment ($N = 539$).

respondents' political orientation. The adjusted R^2 values for benevolence and avoidance-resentment were .29 and .15, respectively. Political orientation showed significant paths with resentment links ($\beta = .19$), restorative justice ($\beta = -.18$), and trust ($\beta = -.19$).

Discussion

The period of Italian terrorism known as the Years of Lead was a period of sociopolitical turmoil in Italy lasting about twenty years from the late 1960s to the end of the 1980s, marked by unprecedented acts of terrorism carried out by minority outgroups, defined as right- and left-wing subversive groups. It was not a civil war because these groups had no official support by any political parties, and their ideology did not break through to the Italian democratic conscience. Nevertheless, the effects of their military actions were grave and forced the State into a tough battle in order to defeat them.

As Pemberton (2014) clearly pointed out, in the context of terroristic violence, which is a public crime, society is not only an interested third party between terrorists and the victims, but

is a victim itself. Several years after the end of the Years of Lead, Italian society has developed a clear acknowledgment that the terrorist crimes not only ruined the lives of the direct victims, but hit and threatened the lives of the broader Italian community and democracy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the social memory of this period is still strong in Italy, and there is a renewed debate concerning adequate ways to heal the wounds of the violence perpetrated and the issue of terrorist rehabilitation. Forgiving the terrorists could be viewed as an answer that Italian society, victim of their violence, can give in order to activate a process of relational repair (see Hewstone et al., 2013; Strelan et al., 2011).

The intergroup forgiveness literature has widely recognized the effects of intergroup emotions and cognitions, such as empathy and trust, in fostering the willingness to forgive a perpetrator outgroup by the members of a victimized group (see Hewstone et al., 2014). There is also empirical evidence suggesting that procedures inspired by a restorative justice concept might enhance the likelihood to forgive (Strelan et al., 2011; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014).

Drawing from these propositions, the aim of present study was to investigate the role that the restorative justice beliefs in association with positive intergroup emotions might play in the forgiveness given by Italian citizens towards the terrorists of the Years of Lead. A preliminary finding showed that the wounds of that period are still effectively open and therefore that the period has had lasting effects on Italian society. The generation that was alive during the period of political terrorism has a stronger perception of the enduring wounds of that period in comparison to the new generation who did not live through those events. The result is not surprising because the social memory of key events in the history of a nation is more vivid for people who were contemporary to those events. However, it is remarkable that even after 25 years, the subsequent generation largely shares the assumption that the period is not over, and society still bears the wounds of the atrocities committed (McAloney et al., 2009). Transgressions committed against the in-group in the past can evoke emotional responses that are likely to transmit across generations and remain intense (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Further research should investigate the content of these wounds. It is plausible that the main issue concerns the discovery of the truth and that Italian citizens experienced something comparable to a secondary victimization (Worthington, 2006) and the experience of an "injustice gap," a discrepancy between the actual level of justice obtained and the level of justice required and desired.

Findings substantially confirmed the proposed model, showing that all the variables considered—outgroup empathy, outgroup trust, and restorative justice beliefs—were positively associated with the positive dimension of forgiveness (benevolence), while outgroup trust and restorative justice beliefs, but not outgroup empathy, were negatively associated with the negative dimension of forgiveness (avoidance/resentment). The absence of a significant association between empathy and resentment might be due to a measurement issue: while the benevolence dimension of forgiveness captures both the emotional and cognitive components of

forgiveness, the resentment dimension of forgiveness assesses only the emotional components of forgiveness.

In the forgiveness literature there is some evidence showing that the cognitive aspect of empathy, like perspective taking, is related to forgiveness only when forgiveness is measured through items tapping the reflective dimension of forgiveness and not the emotional dimension (Welton, Hill, & Seybold, 2008). Relying upon this consideration, one could speculate that in our study, empathy toward terrorists was not linked to the resentment dimension because the cognitive items of the scale were likely to be weakly related to the emotional components of the resentment dimension. Further studies and different measures of the negative dimension of forgiveness are needed to confirm this speculation.

The model accounts for a substantial amount of variance, especially for the positive dimension of forgiveness. This pattern of results suggests that positive intergroup emotions and beliefs in an inclusive conception of justice may enhance a more complete and deep change in attitudes towards the terrorists and not only in the prevention of hatred against them (see Strelan et al., 2011).

Because of the cross-sectional design of the study, one can speculate that the links between the variables could be differently posited. We therefore tested alternative models where the dimensions of forgiveness towards the terrorists were put as antecedents of intergroup emotions and justice beliefs. Results showed worse fit indices compared to the original model, giving further support to the findings of the literature on intergroup forgiveness, which clearly show the antecedent role of empathy and trust on the expressed forgiveness towards the perpetrator group (e.g., Noor et al., 2008).

The study shows a consistent pattern of relations between the posited variables across different social generations, a finding that seems to indicate that the process leading to intergroup forgiveness can be operative for both old and new generations. This process appears also to be independent of political orientation, and this

result further corroborates the impression that we are in the presence of a process that really includes all components of Italian society.

A major finding of the study concerns the positive role that restorative justice beliefs play in the intergroup forgiveness process. There was prior empirical evidence of the link between restorative justice and forgiveness, but this link had not yet been tested in an intergroup context.

The study shows that restorative justice beliefs are associated with both dimensions of forgiveness toward the terrorists. It is likely that a restorative justice concept enhances the acceptance of the perpetrators inside the moral community of the victims (Schnabel & Nadler, 2008), paving the way to a motivational change towards them, as forgiveness does. Future research could test this speculative assumption. However, one has to be cautious in promoting restorative justice as a procedure enhancing a relational repair between terrorists and Italian society. It is undeniable that such a strategy may provoke tensions between private (lack of) forgiveness and public (lack of) forgiveness (Pemberton, 2011, 2014). The victims and relatives of direct victims could perceive societal efforts for restorative justice as disrespectful or a betrayal of their suffering and the sacrifice of their relatives. Analysis of the South African experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) clearly shows how the language of the commission was aimed at promoting forgiveness, independently of and sometimes against the victims' intentions (Verdoolaege, 2012). Reciprocally, society as a victim of terrorism may in no way have a forgiving stance and could react with hostility towards victims who are inclined to grant forgiveness (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

There are a few notable cases of encounters between terrorists and direct victims in Italy, but they are still regarded with suspicion. It is the case, for example, of the daughter of Aldo Moro, the political leader kidnapped and then killed by the Red Brigades, who has chosen to forgive the men who killed her father (Conci, Grignolli, & Mosna, 2008). Time is needed to realize the social

and political conditions required for this form of justice. Unveiling the truth of some still obscure facts, and the responsibility of the institutions in those years might be a necessary preliminary condition to promote a different view of terrorists and to transform the conflict situation in the starting point of a relational reconstruction. However, this study showed a similarity across the generations that seems to indicate that the process leading to intergroup forgiveness, and in particular the possibility of restorative justice towards terrorists, can affect both old and new generations.

Finally, the findings of this study need to be viewed in the context of several limitations. First, the model that we tested is based on correlational data and therefore does not allow us to make clear assumptions on causal relations. Prospective or experimental research would be needed to explore causal links amongst the variables investigated. Second, in order to outline a more comprehensive model, future research should also consider other variables that are likely to affect the forgiving process towards the terrorists. More specifically, it could be important to verify the effects of restorative justice beliefs after controlling for the role of retributive justice beliefs (which were not measured in the present study). In the historical context of Italian terrorism, the fact that many terrorists were not convicted and neither showed remorse nor apologized for their crimes, is likely to have a great influence on the real willingness to forgive. Third, a comparative study including victims who were personally hurt by terrorists' attacks and the victims of the broader community of Italians who suffered from the climate of prolonged terror would help to disentangle the variables affecting the forgiving process in relation to their different points of view.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study presented is amongst the first to examine the role of restorative justice in intergroup forgiveness. The pattern of results is consistent with the idea that adopting a restorative justice perspective and building empathy and trust might be fruitful ways to enhance a positive motivational change towards the terrorists of Italy's Years of Lead.

Funding

This work was supported by a grant given by the MIUR (Ministero Istruzione, Università e Ricerca, IT Anno 2009 – Protocollo: 2009SLSKTJ) to the first author.

References

- Akaike, H. (1973). Information theory and an extension of the maximum likelihood principle. In B. N. Petrov & F. Csaki (Eds.), *Second International Symposium on Information Theory* (pp. 267–281). Budapest, Hungary: Akademiai Kiado.
- Azar, F., Mullet, E., & Vinsonneau, G. (1999). The propensity to forgive, findings from Lebanon. *Journal of Peace Research*, 36, 169–181. doi:10.1177/0022343399036002003
- Batson, C. D., Early, S., & Salvarani, G. (1997). Perspective taking: Imagining how another feels versus imagining how you would feel. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 751–758. doi:10.1177/0146167297237008
- Bentler, P. M. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, 238–246. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.107.2.238
- Bentler, P. M. (1992). On the fit of models to covariances and methodology to the bulletin. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 400–404. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.112.3.400
- Bentler, P. M. (1995). *EQS structural equations program manual*. Encino, CA: Multivariate Software.
- Brewer, M. B., & Alexander, M. G. (2002). Intergroup emotions and images. In D. M. Mackie & E. R. Smith (Eds.), *From prejudice to intergroup relations: Differentiated reactions to social groups* (pp. 209–225). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Burnham, K. P., & Anderson, D. R. (2002). *Model selection and multimodel inference: A practical information-theoretic approach*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Caprara, G. V., Schwartz, S., Capanna, C., Vecchione, M., & Barbaranelli, C. (2006). Personality and politics: Values, traits, and political choice. *Political Psychology*, 27, 1–28. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00447.x
- Cehajic, S., Brown, R., & Castano, E. (2008). Forgive and forget? Antecedents and consequences of intergroup forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Political Psychology*, 29, 351–367. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00634.x
- Conci, A., Grignolli, P., & Mosna, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Sedie Vuote. Gli anni di piombo: Dalla parte delle vittime*. Trento, IT: Il Margine.
- Corbetta, P., Cavazza, N., & Roccato, M. (2009). Between ideology and social representations: Four theses plus (a new) one on the relevance and the meaning of the political left and right. *European Journal of Political Research*, 48, 622–641. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.008_45.x
- De Keijser, J. W., van der Leeden, R., & Jackson, J. L. (2002). From moral theory to penal attitudes and back: A theoretically integrated modeling approach. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 20, 317–335. doi:10.1002/bsl.494
- Dovidio, J. F., ten Vergert, M., Stewart, T. L., Gaertner, S. L., Johnson, J. D., Esses, V. M., ... Pearson, A. R. (2004). Perspective and prejudice: Antecedents and mediating mechanisms. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 1537–1549. doi:10.1177/0146167204271177
- Fasanella, G., & Pellegrino, G. (2005). *La guerra civile*. Torino, IT: Bur, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli.
- Finlay, K. A., & Stephan, W. G. (2000). Improving intergroup relations: The effects of empathy on racial attitudes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30, 1720–1737. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2000.tb02464
- Gromet, D. M., & Darley, J. M. (2011). Political ideology and reactions to crime victims: Preferences for restorative and punitive responses. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 8, 830–855. doi:10.1111/j.1740-1461.2011.01242.x
- Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., Voci, A., Hamberger, J., & Niens, U. (2006). Intergroup contact, forgiveness, and experience of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Social Issues*, 62, 99–120. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00441.x
- Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., Voci, A., McLernon, F., Niens, U., & Noor, M. (2004). Intergroup forgiveness and guilt in Northern Ireland: Social psychological dimensions of “The Troubles.” In N. R. Branscombe & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Collective guilt: International perspectives* (pp. 193–215). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hewstone, M., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Myers, E., Voci, A., Al Ramiah, A., & Cairns, E. (2014). Intergroup contact and intergroup conflict. *Peace and Conflict. Journal of Peace Psychology*, 20, 39–53. doi:10.1037/a0035582
- Hewstone, M., Maslen, H., Cairns, E., Tam, T., Myers, E., & Lloyd, H. (2013). Intergroup forgiveness and apology: Psychological research and philosophical considerations. In C. A. Lewis, R. Amlôt, H. Ansari, K. Loewenthal, M. Cinnirella, & M.

- Booke Rogers (Eds.), *Aspects of terrorism and martyrdom: Dying for good, dying for God* (pp. 39–74). New York, NY: Edwin Mellen.
- Hornsey, M. J., & Wohl, M. J. A. (2013). We are sorry: Intergroup apologies and their tenuous link with intergroup forgiveness. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 24, 1–31. doi:10.1080/10463283.2013.822206
- Leidner, B., Castano, E., & Ginges, J. (2013). Dehumanization, retributive and restorative justice, and aggressive versus diplomatic intergroup conflict resolution strategies. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39, 181–192. doi:10.1177/0146167212472208
- Lewicki, R. J., & Wiethoff, C. (2000). Trust, trust development, and trust repair. In M. Deutsch & P. T. Coleman (Eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (pp. 86–107). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mardia, K. V. (1970). Measures of multivariate skewness and kurtosis with applications. *Biometrika*, 57, 519–530. doi:10.1093/biomet/57.3.519
- McAloney, K., McCrystal, P., Percy, A., & McCartan, C. (2009). Damaged youth: Prevalence of community violence exposure and implications for adolescent well-being in post-conflict Northern Ireland. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37, 635–648. doi:10.1002/jcop.20322
- McDonald, R. P. (1985). Comments on D. J. Bartholomew "Foundations of factor analysis: Some practical implications." *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, 38, 134–137. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8317.1985.tb00827.x
- McLernon, F., Cairns, E., & Hewstone, M. (2002). Views on forgiveness in Northern Ireland. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 14, 285–290. doi:10.1080/1367886022000016839
- Morrison, B., & Ahmed, E. (2006). Restorative justice and civil society: Emerging practice, theory and evidence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 62, 209–215. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00447.x
- Myers, E., Hewstone, M., & Cairns, E. (2009). Impact of conflict on mental health in Northern Ireland: The mediating role of intergroup forgiveness and collective guilt. *Political Psychology*, 30, 269–290. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00691.x
- Nadler, A., & Liviatan, I. (2006). Intergroup reconciliation: Effects of adversary's expressions of empathy, responsibility, and recipients' trust. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 459–470. doi:10.1177/0146167205276431
- Nadler, A., & Saguy, T. (2004). Reconciliation between nations: Overcoming emotional deterrents to ending conflicts between groups. In H. J. Langholz & C. E. Stout (Eds.), *The psychology of diplomacy* (pp. 29–46). New York, NY: Praeger.
- Nadler, A., & Shnabel, N. (2006). Instrumental and socio-emotional paths to intergroup reconciliation and the need-based model of socio-emotional reconciliation. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy, & J. D. Fisher (Eds.), *Social psychology of intergroup reconciliation* (pp. 37–56). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Noor, M., Brown, R., & Prentice, G. (2008). Prospects for intergroup reconciliation: Social-psychological predictors of intergroup forgiveness and reparation in Northern Ireland and Chile. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy, & J. D. Fisher (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup reconciliation* (pp. 97–114). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Pelucchi, S., & Brambilla, M. (2013, September). *La ferita degli anni di piombo: percezioni generazionali a confronto*. Paper presented at the XII National Congress of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP), Padova, Italy.
- Pemberton, A. (2011). Al Qaeda and vicarious victims: Victimological insights into globalized terrorism. In R. M. Letschert & J. J. M. van Dijk (Eds.), *The new faces of victimhood: Globalization, transnational crimes and victim rights* (pp. 233–252). Houten, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Pemberton, A. (2014). Terrorism, forgiveness and restorative justice. *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, 4, 369–389. Retrieved from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2467107>
- Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (2003). *In the wake of 9/11: The psychology of terror*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Russell, D. W. (2002). In search of underlying dimensions: The use (and abuse) of factor analysis in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1629–1646. doi:10.1177/014616702237645
- Satorra, A., & Bentler, P. M. (2001). A scaled difference chi-square test statistic for moment structure analysis. *Psychometrika*, 66, 507–514. doi:10.1007/BF02296192
- Shnabel, N., & Nadler, A. (2008). A needs-based model of reconciliation: Satisfying the differential emotional needs of victim and perpetrator as a key to promoting reconciliation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94, 116–132. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.1.116

- Strelan, P. G., Feather, N. T., & McKee, I. R. (2011). Retributive and inclusive justice goals and forgiveness: The influence of motivational values. *Social Justice Research, 24*, 126–142. doi:10.1007/s11211-011-0132-9
- Swart, H., Hewstone, M., Christ, O., & Voci, A. (2011). Affective mediators of intergroup contact: A three-wave longitudinal study in South Africa. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101*, 1221–1238. doi:10.1037/a0024450
- Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., Tausch, N., Maio, G., & Kenworthy, J. (2007). The impact of intergroup emotions on forgiveness in Northern Ireland. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 10*, 119–136. doi:10.1177/1368430207071345
- Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J. B., Cairns, E., Marinetti, C., Geddes, L., & Parkinson, B. (2008). Postconflict reconciliation: Intergroup forgiveness and implicit biases in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*, 303–320. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00563.x
- Van Tongeren, D. R., Burnette, J. L., O'Boyle, E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Forsyth, D. R. (2014). A meta-analysis of intergroup forgiveness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 9*, 81–95. doi:10.1080/17439760.2013.844268
- Verdoolaege, A. (2012). Public reconciliation at the South African TRC: The impact of the Victim Hearings. In B. A. M. van Stokkom, N. Doorn, & P. van Tongeren (Eds.), *Public forgiveness in post-conflict contexts* (pp. 203–22). Portland, Antwerp: Intersentia.
- Welton, G. L., Hill, P. C., & Seybold, K. S. (2008). Forgiveness in the trenches: Empathy, perspective taking, and anger. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 27*, 168–177. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/Journal+of+Psychology+and+Christianity/publications.aspx>
- Wenzel, M., & Okimoto, T. G. (2014). On the relationship between justice and forgiveness: Are all forms of justice made equal? *British Journal of Social Psychology, 53*, 463–483. doi:10.1111/bjso.12040
- Wenzel, M., Okimoto, T. G., Feather, N. T., & Platter, M. J. (2008). Retributive and restorative justice. *Law and Human Behavior, 32*, 375–389. doi:10.1007/s10979-007-9116-6
- West, S. G., Finch, J. F., & Curran, P. J. (1995). Structural equation models with non-normal variables: Problems and remedies. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Structural equation modeling: Concepts, issues and applications* (pp. 56–75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wohl, M. J. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2008). Remembering historical victimization: Collective guilt for current ingroup transgressions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 988–1006. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.988
- Wohl, M. J. A., Hornsey, M. J., & Bennett, S. H. (2012). Why group apologies succeed and fail: Intergroup forgiveness and the role of primary and secondary emotions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*, 306–322. doi:10.1037/a0024838
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2006). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application*. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.